

Fire Safety for Barns

A guide for fire safety in barns and facilities for farm animals.

Farm animals are very valuable to us. They supplement our income, offer affection, and teach our children. Have you ever thought about how a barn fire would impact your life? Animals that have been trained or bred for a specialty use are not easily replaced. Protection of these valuable animals and their accompanying facilities and equipment should not be overlooked.

1 Prevention – The best fire protection is to prevent a fire from ever starting.

- ☐ **Cleanliness and maintenance** is paramount in keeping a barn fire safe. Dispose of grain bags as they are emptied and empty trash regularly. Clean dust and cobwebs from electrical outlets, lights and appliances. Unplug appliances when not in use. Do not use extension cords.
- ☐ **Heat** – Do not use portable electric or propane heaters in a barn. The fire hazard is too great.
- ☐ **Storage** – Keep aisle ways clear. Don't store fuel or farm equipment in the barn with animals. Store hay, bedding and fuel powered farm equipment in a separate building.
- ☐ **Signage** – Don't take for granted that all visitors to your barn are aware of safety precautions. Use signage as a reminder to all guests. Some suggestions are: (1) "No Smoking", anyone smoking should be asked to leave the area; (2) "General Safety Rules" around farm animals, farm equipment and for riding arenas; and (3) "Emergency Phone Numbers" to include the fire department, a veterinarian, a nearby neighbor that can help, and a way to reach you by pager, office phone, etc.

2 Fire Protection Systems – A fire protection device is equipment engineered to protect buildings and their contents should a fire occur. There are many options, According to Alfred Longhitano, Chairman of the National Fire Prevention Association's Technical Committee for Fire Prevention in Racetrack Stables. Some good options for barns include the following:

- ☐ **Heat Detectors**– A heat detector is a good alarm option in a barn because smoke alarms may be sensitive to dust or condensation. Rate-compensating thermal heat detectors that combine the technology of fixed temperature detectors and rate-of-rise detectors, are dependable and survive well in corrosive environments. The alarm should sound in your home or another remote location, as well as in the barn.
- ☐ **Fire Extinguishers** – A multi-purpose ABC fire extinguisher that can be used on all types of fires is the best extinguisher option for barns because a variety of fuels may be present. A combination ABC extinguisher can be used on flammable liquids and electrical fires, as well as hay, wood, paper, plastics or rubber.
- ☐ **Automatic Sprinkler Systems**– Automatic sprinkler systems are the best means of protecting animals, barns and people. When heat from the fire activates a sprinkler head, water is immediately released onto the fire. It is important to note that an adequate water supply and water pressure are not always available in remote rural areas. This may require a specialized system.
- ☐ **Dry Hydrants** – Dry hydrants provide a water supply for rural areas where hydrated water is not available. A dry hydrant is six inch PVC pipe that stands a couple feet above ground with a standard fire department connection on one end. The other end runs underground to the water source. If you live near a lake, pond, river or stream, a dry hydrant can make water immediately available to the fire department. Contact your local fire department if you are interested in installing a dry hydrant.

3 Emergency Procedures– In case of fire, know what to do.

In a fire emergency, early access to 911 is critical. Have a phone available in the barn area. Your first priorities should be (1) evacuate all persons, (2) call the fire department, (3) evacuate animals, only if the fire is small and there's no risk to your own safety and (4) try to put out the fire, only if it small and isolated and your own safety is not at risk. If the fire does not go out easily, evacuate the area. Go directly to a planned meeting place and stay there. If there are people or animals are trapped inside, notify the fire department.

Reference: National Agricultural Safety Database, University of Main Cooperative Extension, "Fire Safety on the Farm", on line at <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000801-d000900/d000821/d000821.html>

